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Stimulus on tap at Port of Long Beach

By Kristopher Hanson, Staff Writer

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LONG BEACH - Not content waiting for relief from Washington, the Port of Long Beach is positioning itself this year as a one-agency stimulus plan for the region's beleaguered construction workers, engineers and environmental planners.

Drawing on deep reserves accumulated during boom times in the past decade, the city's Harbor Department hopes to break ground on more than \$1.5 billion worth of redevelopment projects by early 2010.

Jointly, the projects - which include a \$750 million face-lift of piers D, E and F - would support more than 3,700 new jobs annually during a decadelong building spree.

"The projects are going to put local construction and contracting firms to work immediately and lead to (several thousand) permanent jobs in the goods-movement industry," said Port of Long Beach Executive Director Richard Steinke during a State of the Port address Friday afternoon (available at www.polb.com).

While the port continues angling for a slice

of roughly \$9 billion in infrastructure money tucked into President Obama's stimulus package, most of the funding for harbor redevelopment comes from port revenues, grants and bonds.

Steinke also claimed the port's "stellar" credit rating allows the department to borrow more money, if needed.

"We have the highest credit rating among all seaports in the nation," Steinke said, referring to a report by the Government Finance Officers Association.

Included in the port's wish list for the coming year are replacement of the aging Gerald Desmond Bridge at a cost of \$1.1 billion and a \$650 million redevelopment of vacant Pier S.

The port has already broken ground on a new \$55million Pier G office building, and it plans to begin work on a \$218 million port authority headquarters by summer.

Most of the projects were delayed for years as the city grappled with growing environmental problems - most of which have been mitigated through a clean-air initiative adopted in late 2007 with input from local environmental and community groups.

Meanwhile, in the Port of Los Angeles, work

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is under way on a \$500 million makeover of the TransPacific (TRAPAC) terminal in the inner harbor. Officials also approved a \$200 million expansion of the China Shipping terminal on the Los Angeles side expected to begin this year.

Those projects are expected to generate more than 1,200 construction and engineering jobs annually for several years.

"I don't know of any industry going out there right now and offering this level of investment," said Michelle Grubbs, vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association. "And it couldn't come at a better time for people worried about losing their jobs or those already out of work."

The projects have strong backing from several local labor unions, including those representing electrical workers, pipe-fitters, machinists and longshore workers.

Projects are also being promoted by business organizations like the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association and the Long Beach Chamber of Commerce, forging an unusual pro-

growth alliance between business and labor.

"People are hungry for work and looking for any new opportunities," Grubbs said. "You see people networking more and finding

common ground."

Several of the projects, including replacement of the Gerald Desmond in Long Beach, still await approval from local, state and federal agencies.

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